ELDRITCH
HALLOWEEN

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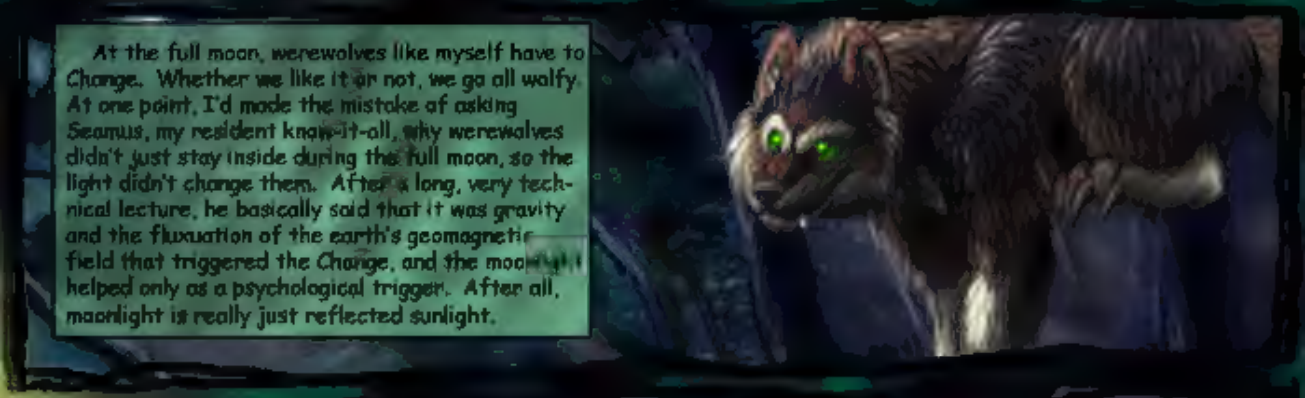
At the full moon, werewolves like myself have to Change. Whether we like it or not, we go all wolfy. At one point, I'd made the mistake of asking Seamus, my resident know-it-all, why werewolves didn't just stay inside during the full moon, so the light didn't change them. After a long, very technical lecture, he basically said that it was gravity and the fluxuation of the earth's geomagnetic field that triggered the Change, and the moonlight helped only as a psychological trigger. After all, moonlight is really just reflected sunlight.



Anyway, apparently when a werewolf's body is sensitive to certain gravitational forces. Even though the gravitational effects are "practically negligible," when a werewolf of the "grahll" variety like myself feels both the gravitational pull of the earth and the sun from one direction, and then the pull of the moon from nearly the opposite direction, it, along with some nonsence about the moon messing with geometric fields triggers the change. Though, Seamus does say that like other monthly cycles, it's not a perfect biological process. Thus, sometimes, it will come a day early or a day late, though technically still on one of the three days that people consider the full moon. Fantastic.

Although, according to Seamus, this full moon stuff isn't really all that weird. Lots of animal behaviors are altered by the full moon, be it mating or getting into trouble. Heck, even among humans, the full moon plays a part. Did you know that some folks swear that more babies are born on a full moon? Seamus says there's not enough evidence to support it, but he believes it too. He says the same about something called Lunar Effect. It's just a theory, but it says that the full moon makes some, if not all people more emotionally charged, even aggressive. That's apparently how we got the word lunatic.

Of course, if I told any normal person that I was a werewolf, that's just what they'd call me: a lunatic.

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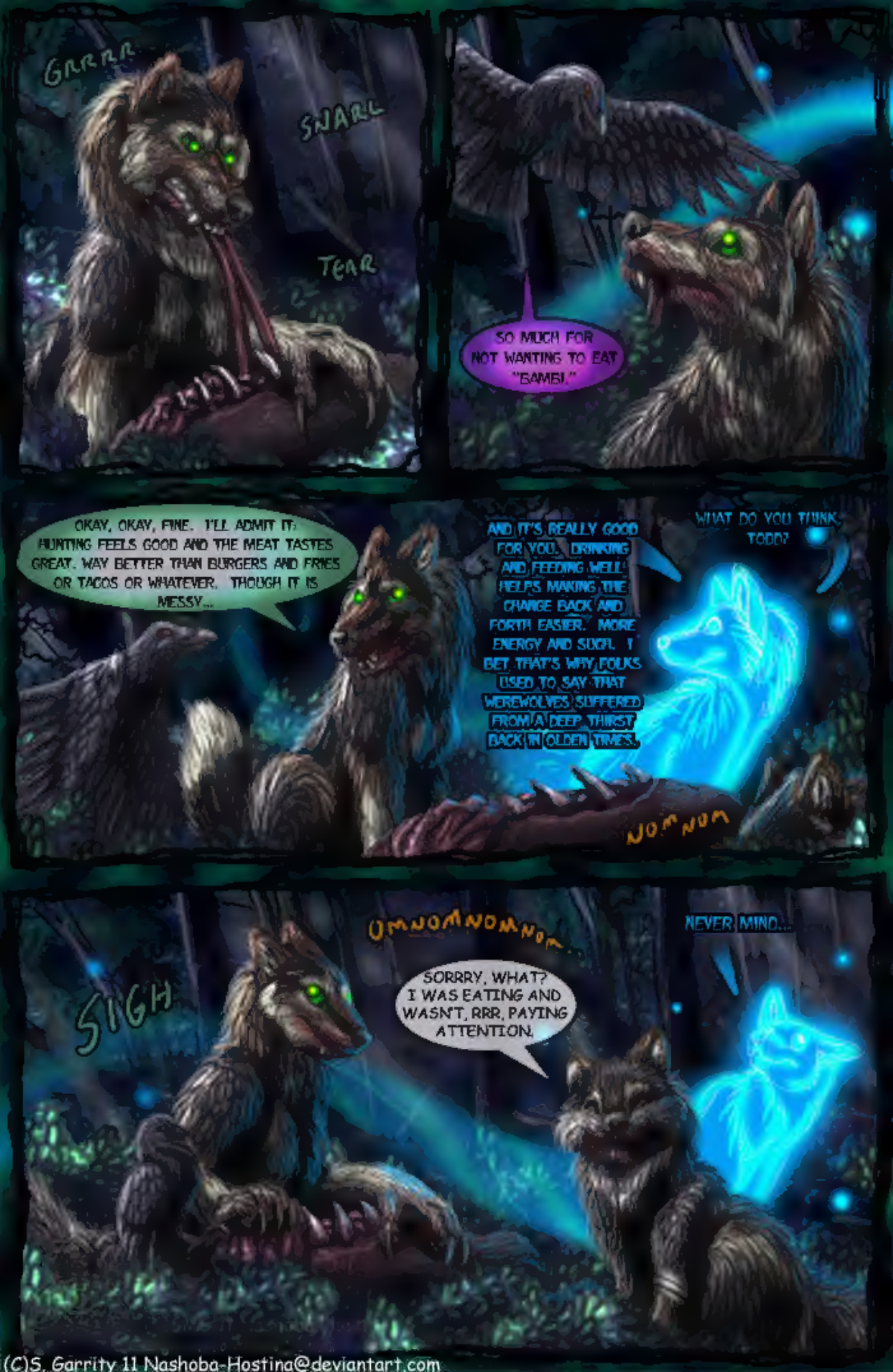

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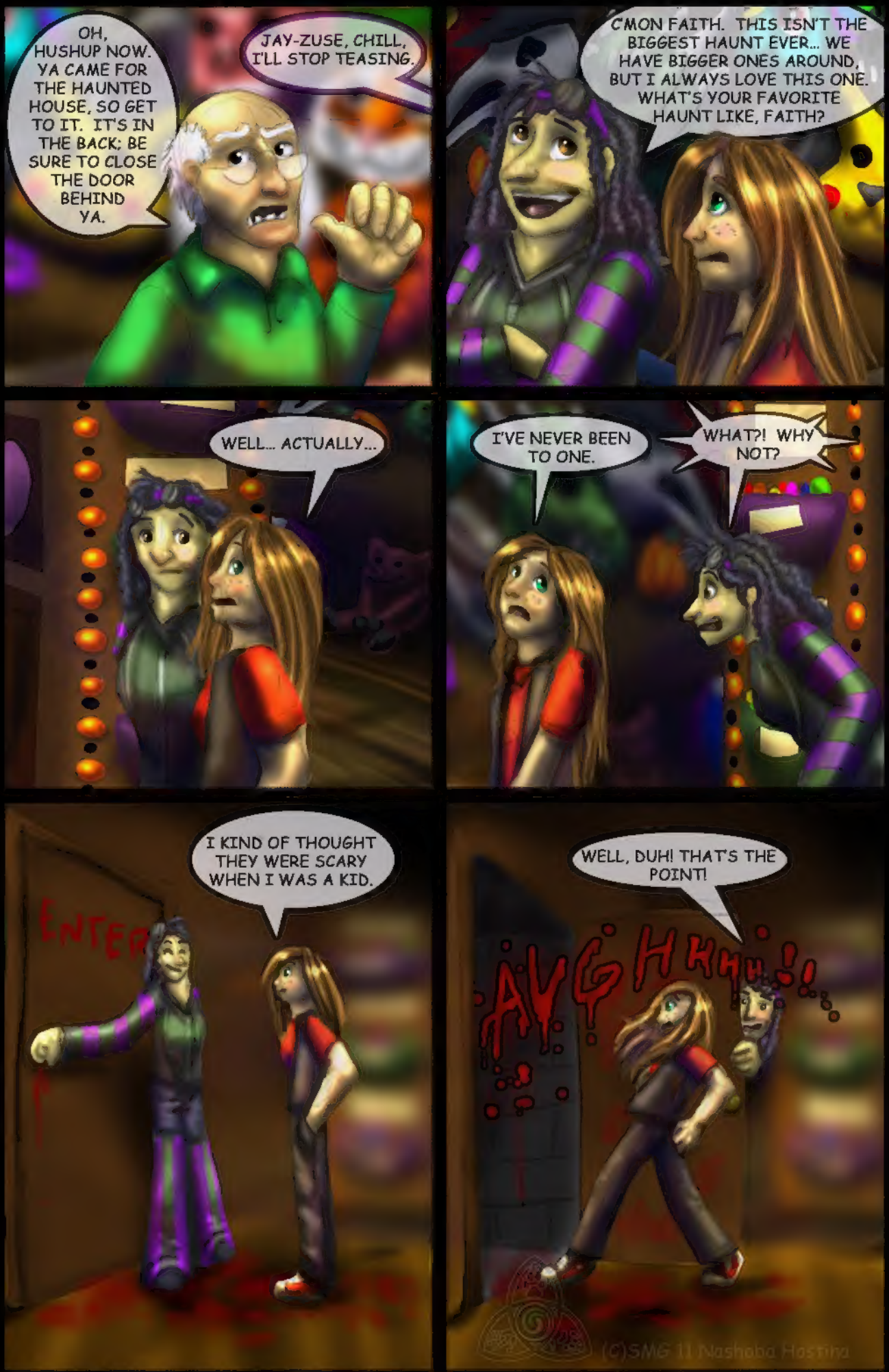

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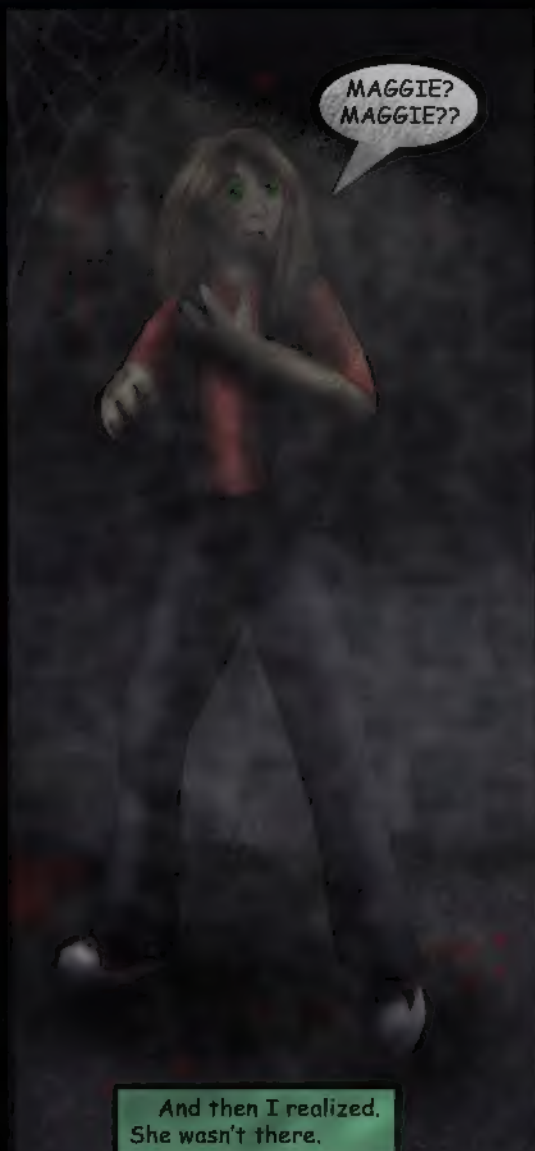
The inside of the haunted house was dark, and speakers were blasting sound effects with eerie music. A recording of a heartbeat thudded over piano notes while screeches and screams filled the background. Over the rank of artificial fog, I caught something... a scent that seized my attention, but I couldn't place it.

It was acrid, musky, and salty. Just the presence of it made my heart start to pound, and as I felt a jolt of adrenalin rush through me, I realized it was the scent of fear, very similar to the scent I caught when chasing down deer. However, I found that while part of me reacted by feeling scared myself, something in me was... very excited by the scent of something else being afraid.

As I navigated the twists and turns of the poorly lit maze, I found that my senses began to adjust... and over adjust. While it was still dark, sometimes I was able to make out the walls, even though I shouldn't have been able to by human standards. My ears hurt from the noise, even though I found myself straining in vain to hear sounds of those who had been so scared... but I couldn't even make out Maggie's footsteps behind me over the noise.



And then I realized. She wasn't there.

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Suddenly alone, the excitement I felt faded, leaving me only with a steadily intensifying chill creeping down my spine. I was on my own. Trapped in a tight, dark, maze. Part of me couldn't believe that being alone was... really bothering me. It was weird. I used to love being alone; I didn't need anyone. And yet... my mind kept going back to the other night in the woods. I kept thinking about how scared I had been... and how much my friends helped. The fear I'd felt the other night began creeping into what I felt now, even though I knew I was safe... this had to be safe, right?

Yeah. Sure. I'd thought the woods were safe too.

But then, I caught a whiff of Maggie's scent. It was kind of a mixture of dust and chicken and mountain dew. But even though I was trying to sniff Maggie out, it was difficult.

The fake fog masked details, and the smell of cold sweat clogged up my nose. I tried to follow the rank of fear, the one strong scent my panicking mind was able to hold onto... but the people who had been in here before me had been just as lost as I now was. The scent lead me in circles.

MAGGIE?

AUGH!

IT'S... FAKE. THEY'RE NO REAL MONSTERS IN HERE...

And yet something still went bump in the night. Great. Just great.

THUD

BUMP

THAT HAD BETTER BE YOU, MAGGIE!

COME OUT NOW, THIS ISN'T FUNNY ANYMORE.

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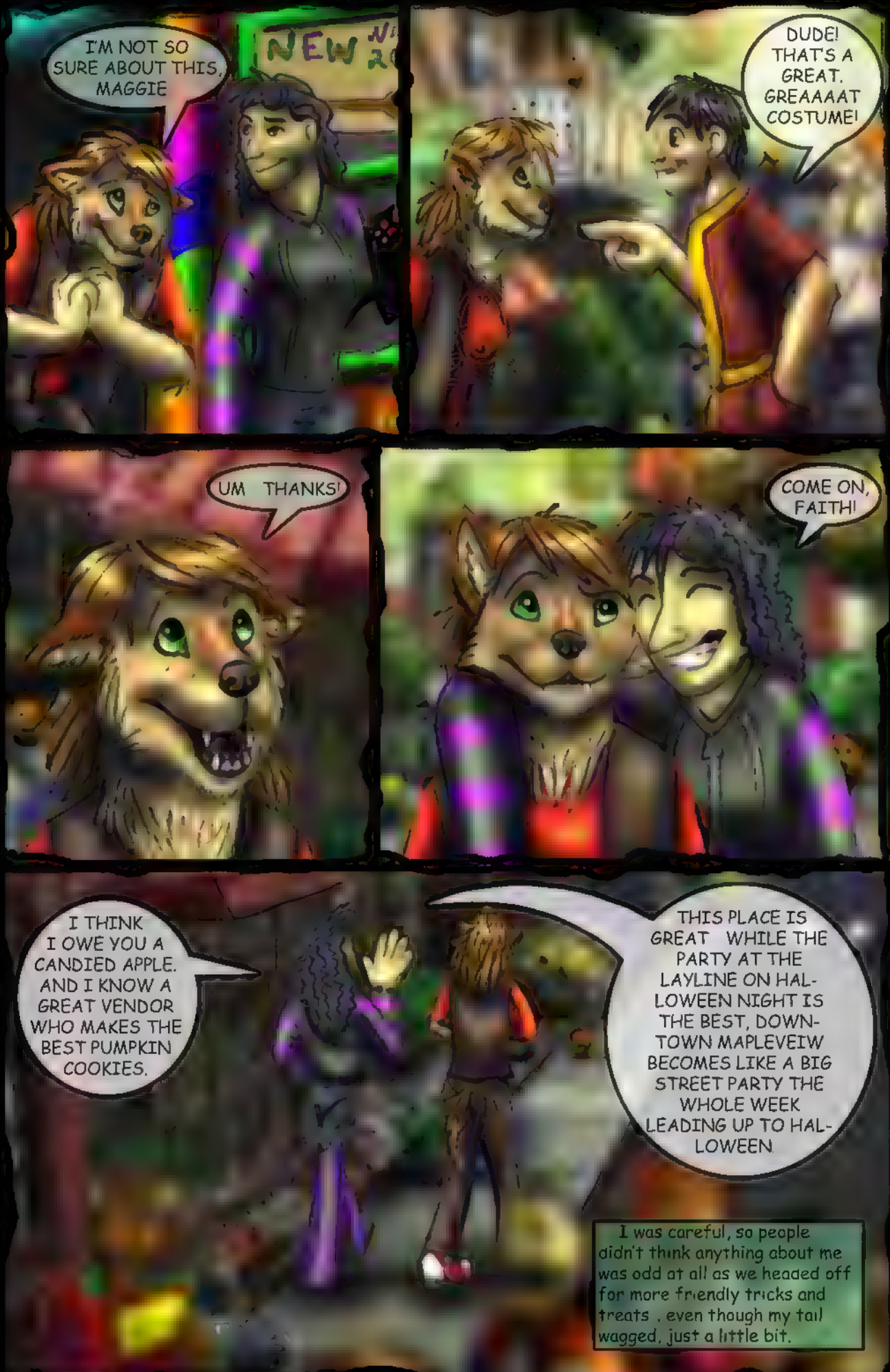

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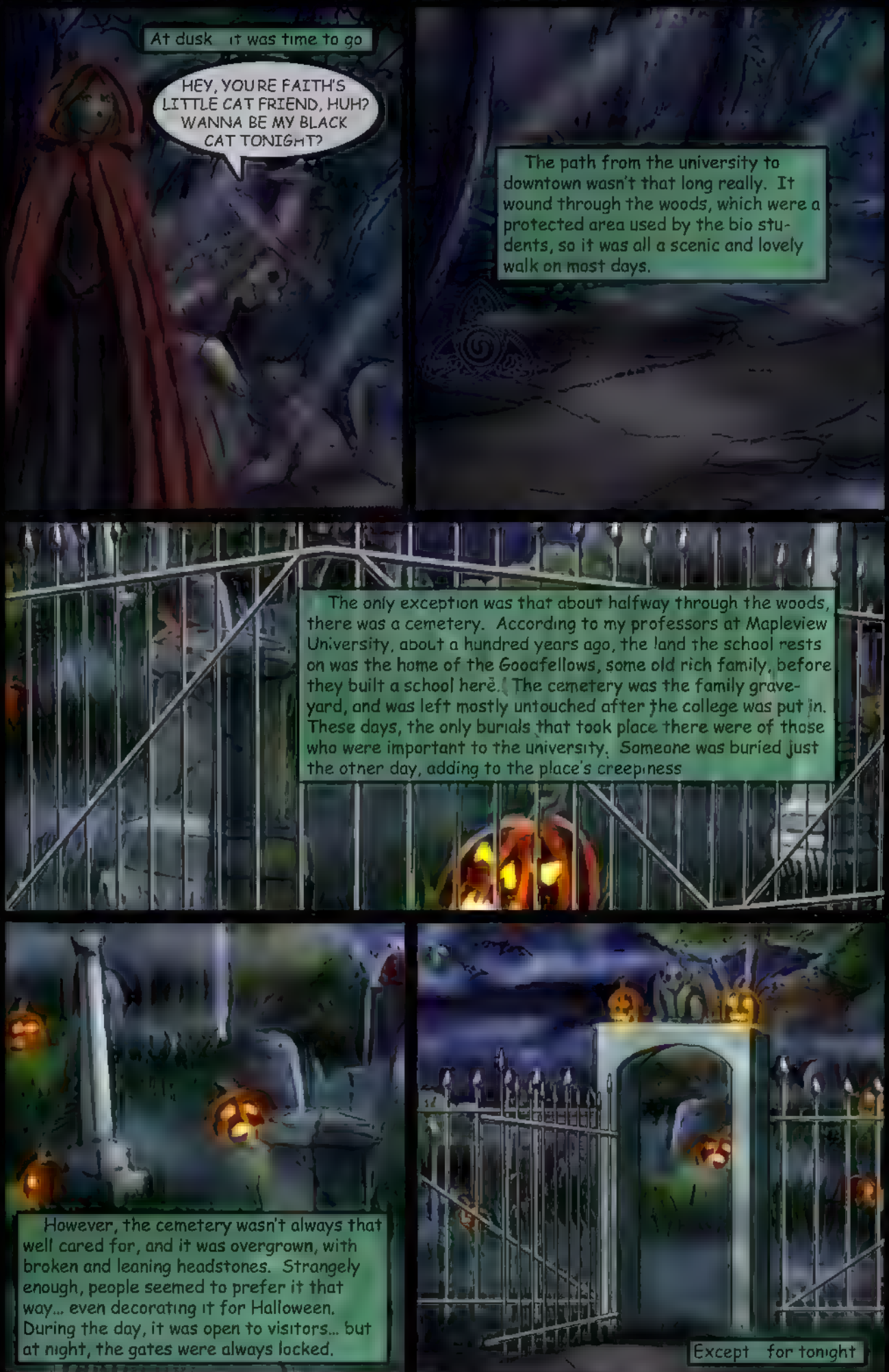

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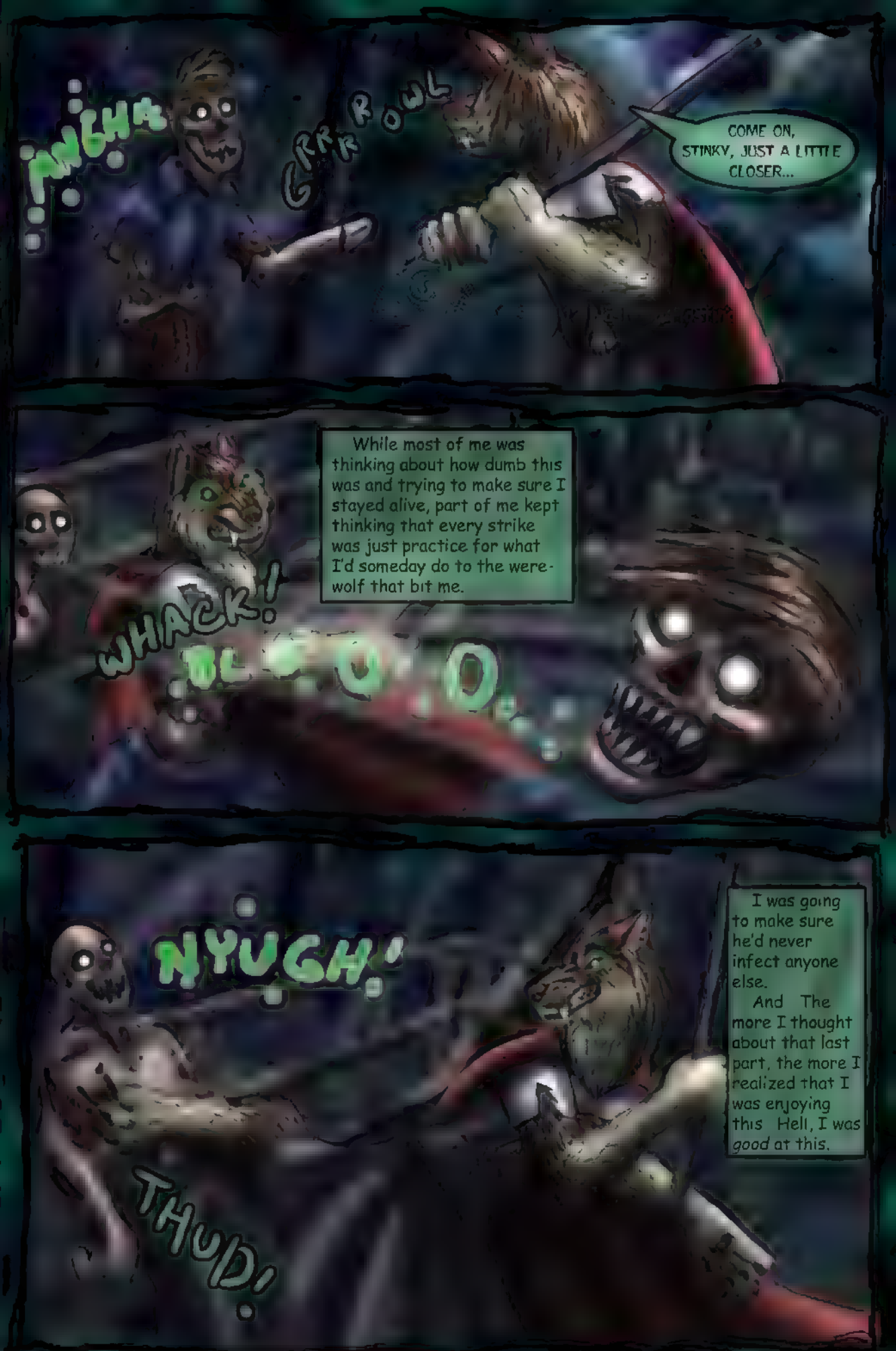

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CRACK!
Had these been, you know, normal people, this would have been awful. But these were threats to myself and others. I was protecting my friends and my home, and that felt so... so RIGHT. Like I was born to do this. But as I fought, I began to feel so conflicted .. Part of me felt inclined toward using the rusty pole, while the rest of me wanted nothing more than to drop it and go at them with my teeth and claws. Though Maggie warned me not to bite them, I wanted to do to them what I did to deer: leap upon them and rip them open.
The conflicting urges were distracting
GRRR
SCHLOOP
GAKTH!
Crap.
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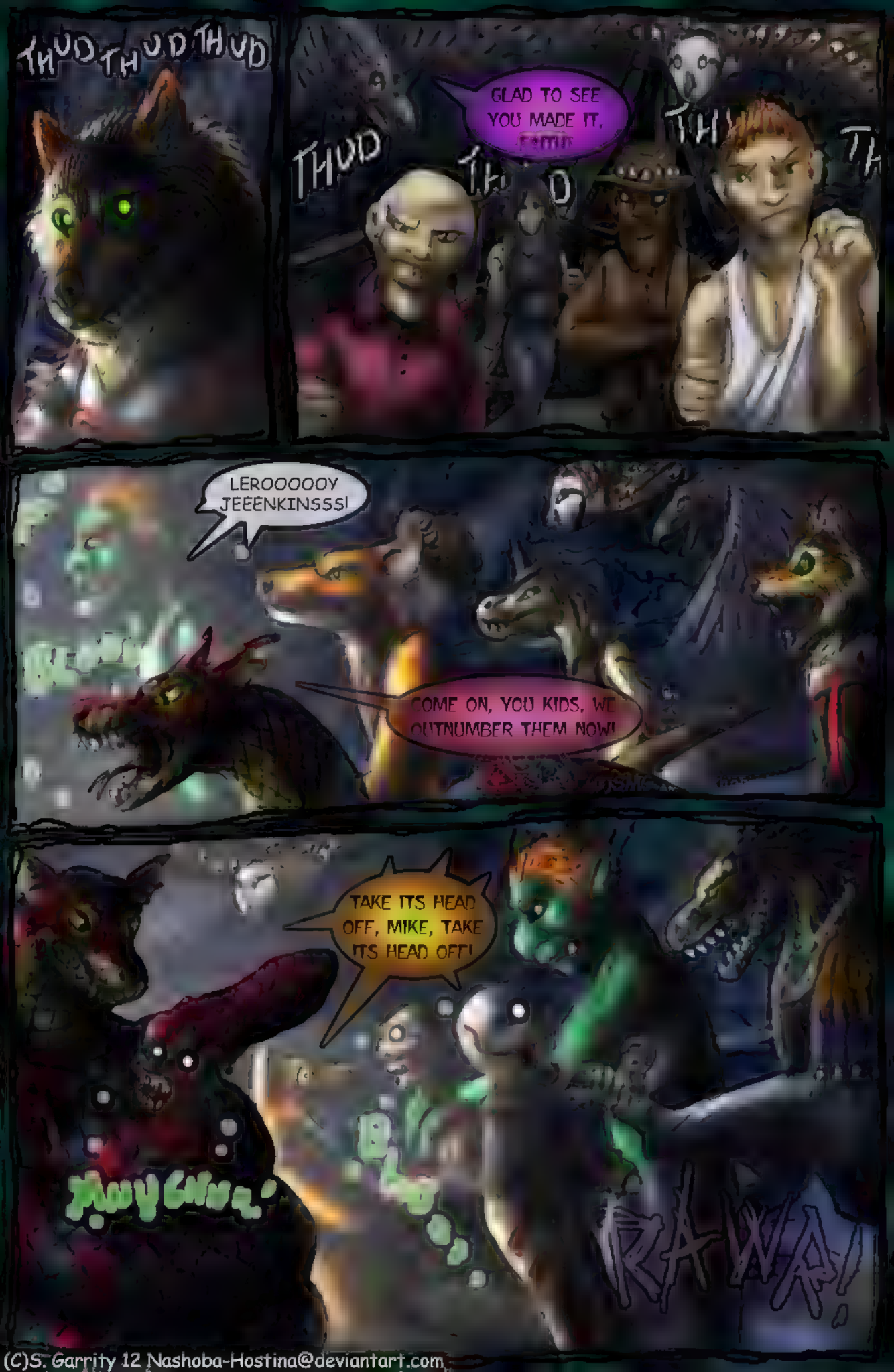

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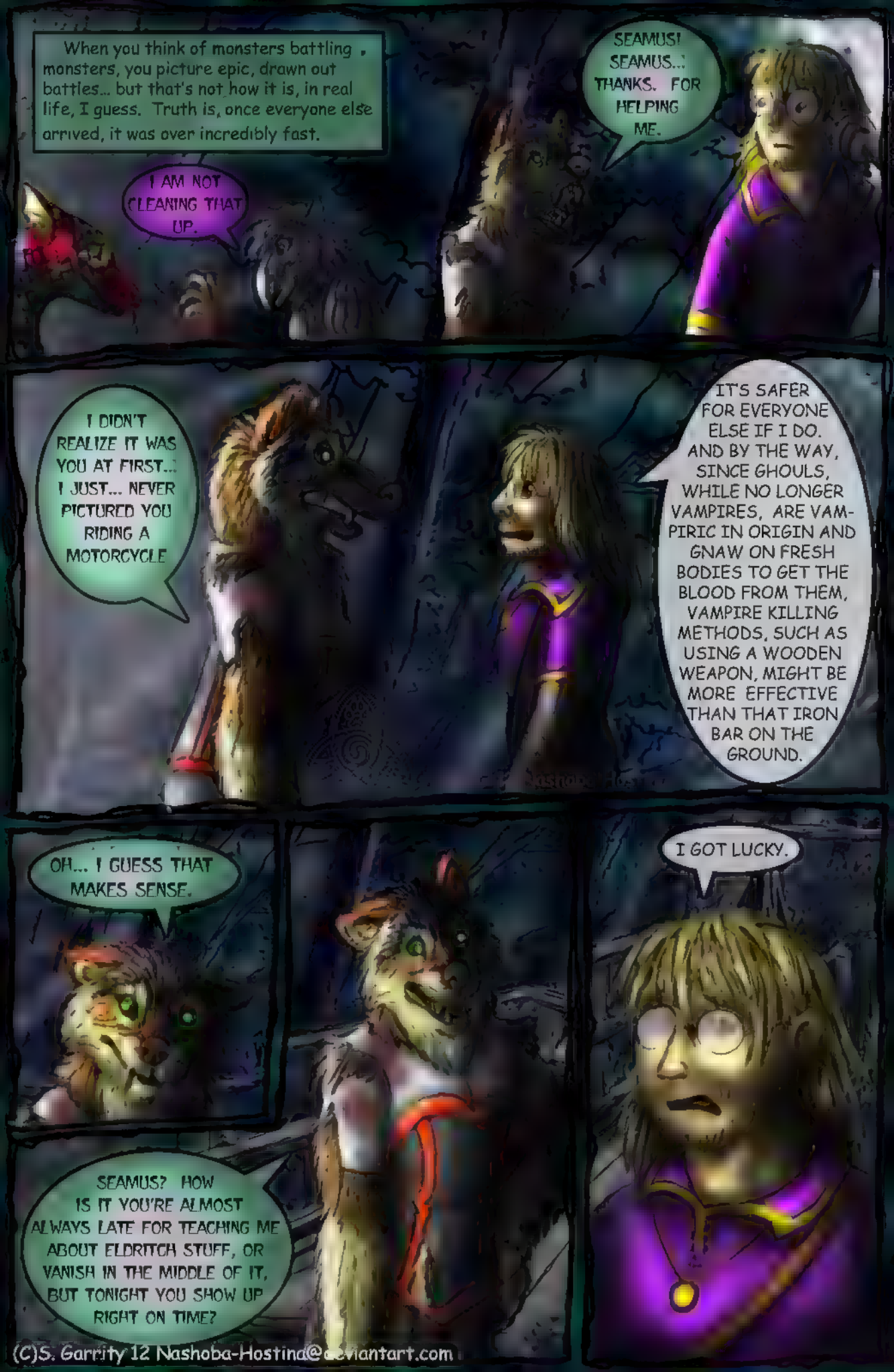
When you think of monsters battling monsters, you picture epic, drawn out battles... but that's not how it is, in real life, I guess. Truth is, once everyone else arrived, it was over incredibly fast.
I AM NOT CLEANING THAT UP.
SEAMUS! SEAMUS...! THANKS. FOR HELPING ME.
I DIDN'T REALIZE IT WAS YOU AT FIRST...! I JUST... NEVER PICTURED YOU RIDING A MOTORCYCLE
IT'S SAFER FOR EVERYONE ELSE IF I DO. AND BY THE WAY, SINCE GHOULS, WHILE NO LONGER VAMPIRES, ARE VAMPIRIC IN ORIGIN AND GNAW ON FRESH BODIES TO GET THE BLOOD FROM THEM, VAMPIRE KILLING METHODS, SUCH AS USING A WOODEN WEAPON, MIGHT BE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THAT IRON BAR ON THE GROUND.
OH... I GUESS THAT MAKES SENSE.
I GOT LUCKY.
SEAMUS? HOW IS IT YOU'RE ALMOST ALWAYS LATE FOR TEACHING ME ABOUT ELDRITCH STUFF, OR VANISH IN THE MIDDLE OF IT, BUT TONIGHT YOU SHOW UP RIGHT ON TIME?
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DO YOU REMEMBER ME TELLING YOU ONCE THAT THE WIZARDS WERE EXTINCT, BUT THEY HAD LEFT LEGACIES .. AND THAT TWO OF THEM WERE THE MAGES AND THE MANCERS?
ER... KIND OF?
WELL, WHILE HUMAN FOLKLORE SAYS NOTHING OF IT, ELDRITCH LEGEND SAYS THAT WIZARDS GATHERED TOGETHER TO PERFORM A SPELL THAT WOULD ALTER THE WORLD TO A POINT WHERE MUNDANE FOLKS WOULD OFTEN BECOME MAGICAL THEMSELVES. THE THOUGHT WAS, THAT IF MOST PEOPLE WERE OF THE ELDRITCH SORT, THEN THAT WOULD BECOME THE NORM AND IT WOULD STOP THE SLAUGHTER OF MUNDANE AND ELDRITCH FOLK ALIKE.
BUT THAT DIDN'T HAPPEN.
OOOKAY. SO THEN, COULD YOU BRIEFELY TELL ME WHAT YOUR UH, MARK IS THEN?
THAT'S RIGHT. SOMETHING WENT WRONG. NOT ONLY DID THEIR ATTEMPTS FAIL TO MAKE THE MAJORITY OF THE WORLD POPULATION ELDRITCH, BUT THEY THEMSELVES VANISHED. WHAT DID HAPPEN IS THAT THE WORLD WAS PEPPERED WITH... HOW TO PUT IT MINIMALLY? ...DORMANT REMNANTS OF SORCERY, BITS OF MAGICAL ENERGY WITH PROPERTIES DESIGNED TO ALTER THE PHYSIOLOGY OF WHATEVER HUMAN COMES ACROSS IT. THIS GIVES THEM AN ELDRITCH SKILL, LIKE THE ABILITY TO LEVITATE, OR USE BOTANOMANCY. WE CALL THESE BITS OF MAGIC "MARKS." AND THOSE WHO WERE MARKED BY MAGIC IN THIS WAY DEVELOP EITHER INTO MAGES OR MANCERS. MAGES' MAGIC LIES MAINLY DORMANT, COMING TO THE SURFACE AND BECOMING AVAILABLE TO THEM AS THEY DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS. MANCERS THOUGH, THEIR MAGIC IS UNRESTRAINED AND UNPREDICTABLE. SOME MANCERS LEARN TO MANAGE THEIR MAGIC, BUT MOST OF THEM MEET UNTIMELY ENDS DUE TO MAGICAL FLARE-UPS. I HAPPEN TO BE A MANCER--
I'M A CHRONOMANCER.
...HUH?

I'M A MANCER THAT DOESN'T AGE, AND CAN JUMP THROUGH TIME. ONE MOMENT, I WAS PARKED ON THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AT NOON, I FELT THE JUMP COMING ON, AND THEN, IT WAS NIGHT AND I HEARD THE COMMOTION IN THE WOODS. THAT'S HOW I GOT HERE FIRST.
THAT'S SO COOL! YOU CAN DO NEAT STUFF WITHOUT EVEN BEING A MONSTER OR ANYTHING!
I WISH I THOUGHT SO.
WHY DON'T YOU?
EVEN THOUGH I'VE BEEN AT IT FOR LONGERTHAN I CARE TO REMEMBER... I CAN'T CONTROL WHEN I JUMP THROUGH TIME, AND WHEN I DO JUMP, IT'S ONLY FORWARD.
WAIT... HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN A... MANCER?
I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY. WHEN YOU MISS CHUNKS OF TIME, YOU CAN'T TELL HOW OLD YOU REALLY ARE. BUT WHEN I GOT MY MARK, I UNWILLINGLY LEFT MY WIFE AND SON... IN THE SIXTEEN HUNDREDS. ONE MOMENT, I WAS STANDING AT MY FRONT DOOR... THE NEXT THE BUILDING WAS GONE. BEFORE I COULD FIND OUT WHAT HAD HAPPENED... I JUMPED AGAIN. I'VE SINCE SPENT MY LIFE TRYING TO WORK OUT HOW TO SCIENTIFICALLY ALTER MY MAGICAL ABILITY OR USE SOMEONE ELSE'S ABILITY TO SEND ME BACK SO I COULD SEE MY WIFE AND SON AGAIN, EVEN IF ONLY FOR A MOMENT, SO I COULD TELL THEM HOW MUCH I LOVE THEM, AND SAY GOODBYE.
NO WONDER YOU KNOW SO MUCH; YOU'VE BEEN AT IT FOR SO LONG. SEAMUS, I... I'M SORRY, I...
SEAMUS?
SEAMUS?

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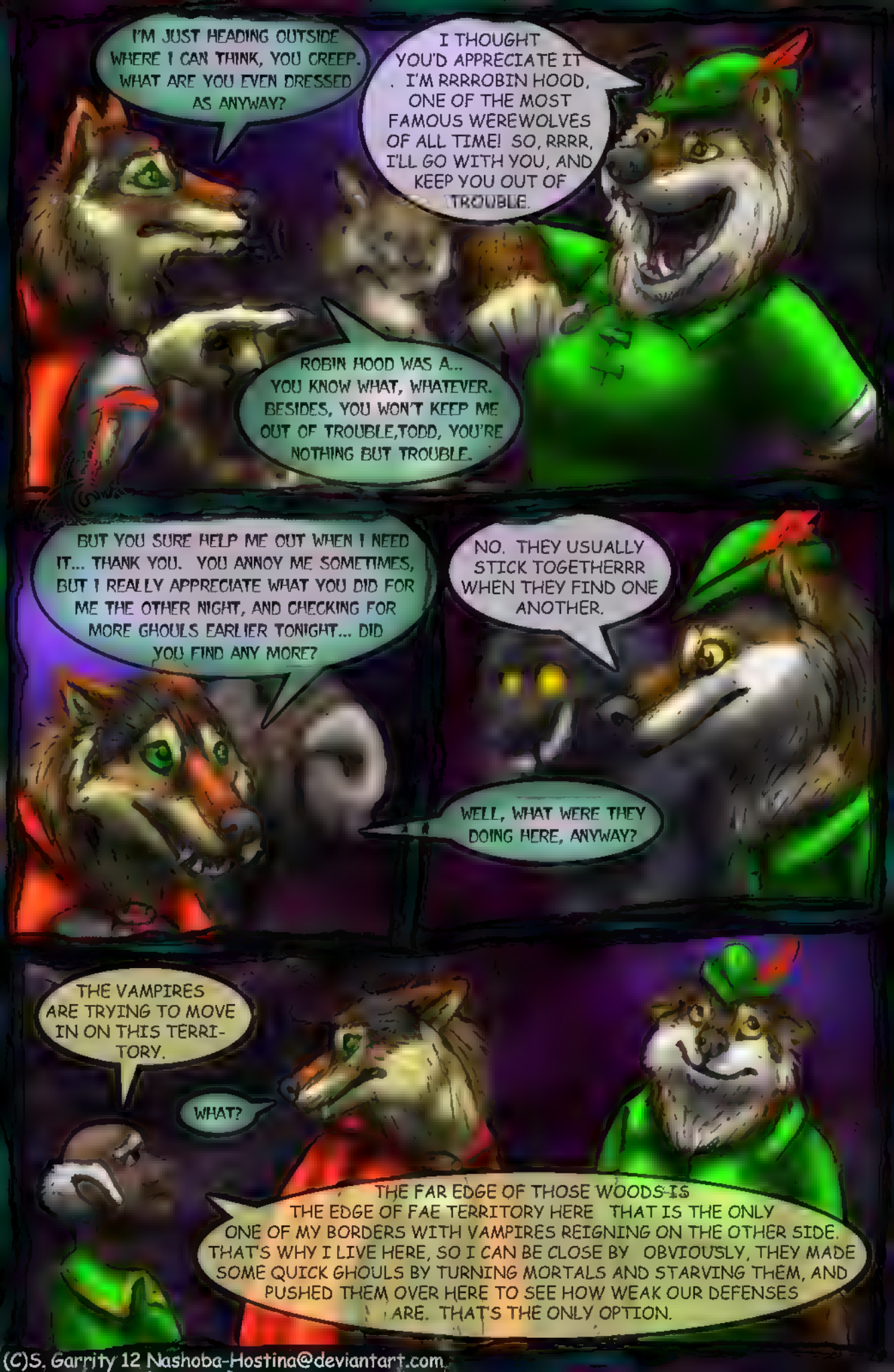

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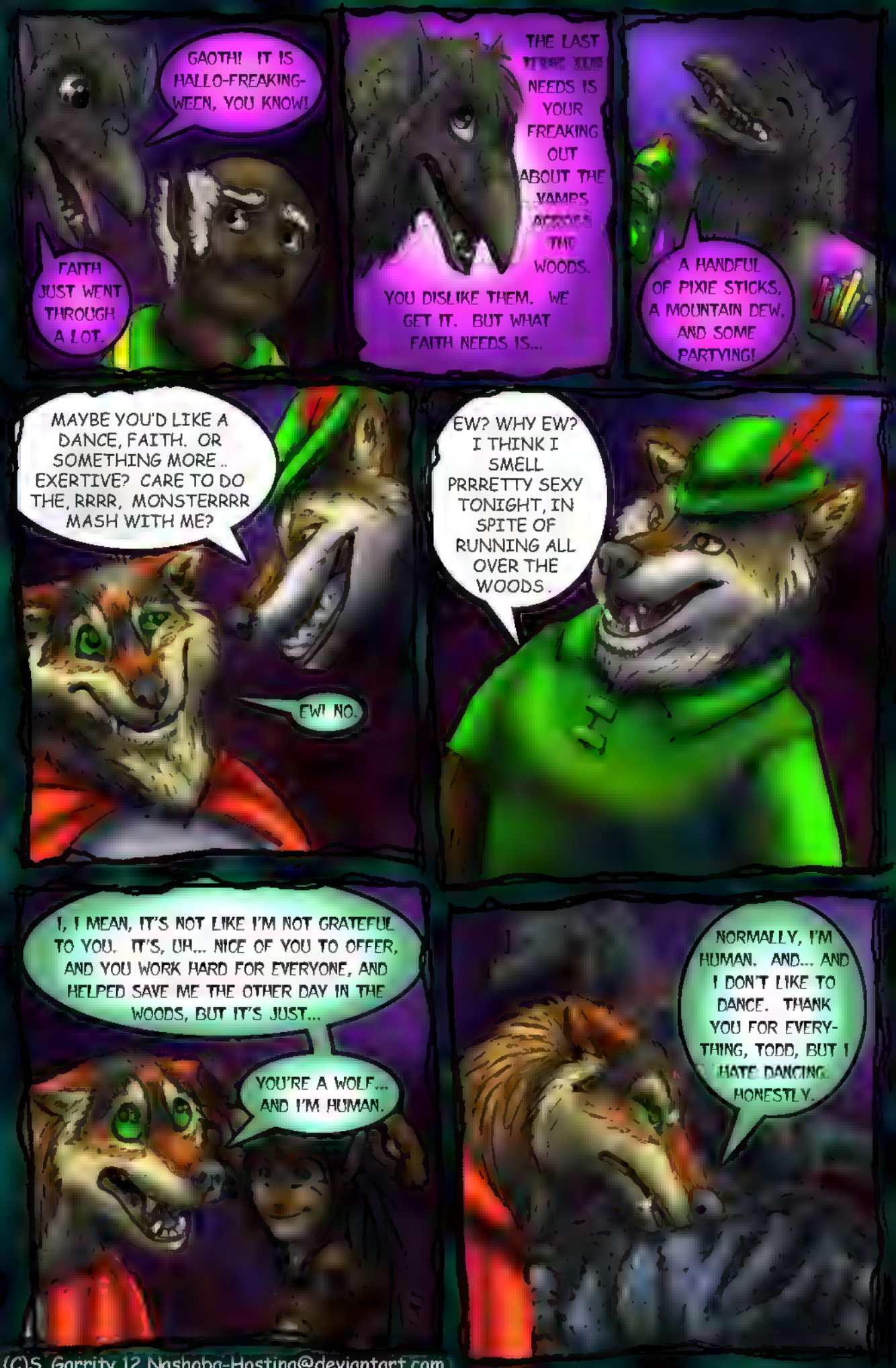

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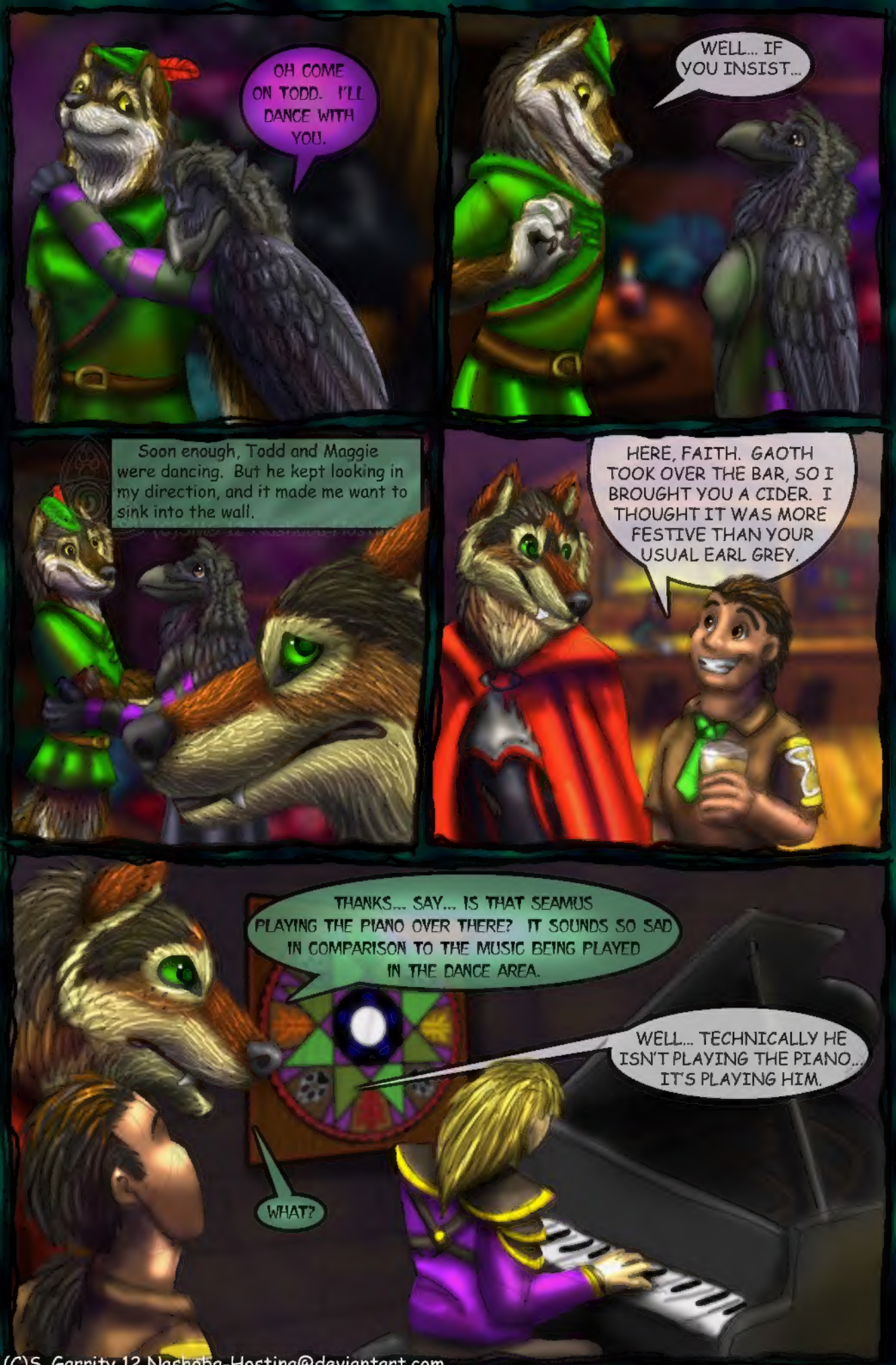

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WELL, GAOTH SAID THAT THE PIANO KEYS ARE MADE WITH ENCHANTED BONE. THE BONES USED TO BE TOSSED AND HOW THEY FELL WOULD INDICATE A PERSON'S TRUE BEING OR INTENT. WELL, GAOTH WANTED A WAY OF EVALUATING PEOPLE IN A WAY EVERYONE COULD UNDERSTAND... SO HE HAD THE PIANO MADE. WHEN SOMEONE PUTS THEIR HANDS ON THE KEYS, THEY'RE COMPELLED TO PLAY SOMETHING THAT REVEALS THEIR TRUE SELF.
HAVE YOU EVER PLAYED IT?
SURE.
WHAT DID YOU PLAY?
THE IMPERIAL DEATH MARCH.
DYLAN, JUST BECAUSE WE HADN'T BEEN IN TOUCH FOR A WHILE, I STILL KNOW WHEN YOU'RE LYING... COME ON, TELL ME!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'D CALL IT... BUT IT IMPRESSED GAOTH. AFTER THAT, HE TOOK ME IN, AND HAS BEEN LOOKING AFTER ME EVER SINCE. I GO TO CLASS DURING THE DAY, WORK HERE AT NIGHT AND SLEEP IN AN ATTACHED APARTMENT RIGHT HERE.
Nashoba Hostina
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In ancient times, Halloween, which was apparently called Samhain, was more astronomical... It was when day and night were about equal, with the hard work and bounty of the harvest finished, but with the death and darkness of winter lying ahead. Later, the Christian church adopted the holiday and celebrated it as a day to remember the saints and those who had passed away. They called it all Hallow's Evening. Later, it got abbreviated and became Halloween. But, for a lot of people, it's lost that religious meaning. So you get those like me, thinking of it as a time for the walking dead and monsters hiding in your closet.
However, you know, I think I was wrong about Halloween. I mean, sure, it'll still be about the dead and monsters and whatnot... but Halloween isn't about dwelling on the dead, or what might kill you. Sure, it may look toward the darkest, scariest time of the year... but it's more about looking into that darkness, knowing all of the hardships you've been through and will have to go through in the future, and celebrating that right now, at this instant...
You're still alive.
End Chapter Four: Halloween
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